

# **Finding Aid of the Betty Ann Knudsen Papers PC.1960**

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This finding aid was produced using the Archivists' Toolkit

July 19, 2012

State Archives of North Carolina  
June, 2012  
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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	State Archives of North Carolina
<b>Creator</b>	Knudsen, Betty Ann, 1926-
<b>Title</b>	Betty Ann Knudsen Papers
<b>Date [bulk]</b>	Bulk, 1978-2005
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1974-2005
<b>Extent</b>	1.3 Cubic feet (4 boxes)
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>Betty Ann Leonard Knudsen (1926- ) was a trailblazing woman politician and community activist in Wake County as well as an avid butterfly lover. She was the first female chair of the Wake County Board of Commissioners (1976-1984); a founding member (1976) and president of the Women's Forum of North Carolina; and she was a member of numerous boards, councils, and associations on the state and local level since the 1970s. Additionally, she has been an active mentor to other women in politics and leadership positions. She self-published a children's riddle book in the late 1990s entitled, <i>How Are Butterflies Like Chickens?</i> to aid her butterfly presentations to children, as well as a DVD about butterflies. Her love of butterflies and commitment to the nurturing of women culminated in the founding of an informal group in 1976. Named the Royal Order of the Butterflies, it was inspired by a line from a poem, "you can fly, but the cocoon has to go."</p>
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>This collection contains correspondence between Betty Ann Knudsen and various politicians on a political and personal level; correspondence related to the Royal Order of the Butterflies; her children's book, DVD,</p>

and butterfly presentations; as well as material reflecting her political and community action and involvement; and personal correspondence with family members and friends from the 1970s to the 2000s.

**Preferred Citation**

[Identification of item], PC.1960, Betty Ann Knudsen Papers, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC, USA.

## Biographical Note

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Betty Ann Leonard Knudsen (1926- ) was born to Lester Bolton and Nelle Lloyd Leonard. Like her parents, Betty Ann was a Tennessee native. Her early, formative years, however, were spent with her family in Georgia, in the cities of Savannah and Atlanta. As a young student Betty Ann Knudsen wanted to enter Georgia Technical Institute (as did her brothers), and become an architect. During that era women were not admitted to Georgia Tech, so she chose instead the University of Georgia, majored in psychology, and made a life commitment to speak out with courage and conviction. As a Phi Beta Kappa graduate in 1948, and as an early feminist, Betty Ann proved to be a scholar, personality, and voice of distinction.

In 1950, Betty Ann married John Peter Knudsen (1926-2009), and the couple would later have three children together, followed by four grandchildren. Family life did not slow her down as she sought political office, fulfilled political duties, and served on various other boards, councils, and associations dealing with state and local issues, political and non-political. When not busy with her own politics (and even after eventually retiring from politics) she actively assisted numerous women in running for office and learning the ropes of politics. Her belief in the leadership abilities of women, as well as a love of butterflies, led her to, in 1976, create an informal group, The Royal Order of the Butterflies, a metaphor for women coming out of secure cocoons, taking risks, and blossoming into positions of personal power and leadership. Initially members were selected by Mrs. Knudsen and included women politicians and non-profit leaders. Each received a butterfly pin and a poem with the message “you can fly, but the cocoon has to go.” The idea for the group came to her during the period that she was running as a Democrat and elected to the Wake County Board of Commissioners, 1976. Following that race, she was named commission chair, the first woman to serve in that capacity in Wake County; after four years she was reelected and served through 1984.

The lives of Betty Ann and Pete Knudsen were closely intertwined until his death, January 18, 2009. From the start they were mutually supportive of their careers and various commitments. He had begun his professional career as a professor of physics, then as a research scientist who moved eventually into corporate management. From the mid-1950s, Knudsen spent around twenty-five years with Chemstrand, Inc., and its parent company Monsanto, during which time he was awarded 15 U.S. patents.

Pete Knudsen and his family were among the first “technology immigrants” to the Research Triangle area when Chemstrand opened its research facility in 1960 in the recently established Research Triangle Park. He retired from his last Monsanto position in 1981 after declining an offered promotion that would have required relocation to the corporate headquarters. This decision was made to support and to remain with his wife, Betty Ann, who at the time was still serving as a Wake County Commissioner. He then became president and CEO of Quline Corp., a Raleigh company engaged in the manufacture of geotextiles for the railroad and construction industries, until that company was sold in 1986.

The Knudsen’s love of Lepidoptera (an order of insects including moths and butterflies), nature, and ecology led Pete and Betty Ann to move to Costa Rica in 1988, where they lived for the next seven years. Their large collection of native and exotic butterflies was assembled from specimens obtained there (and from other expeditions taken over time to the tropics of Central and South America, Asia, and Africa).

While in Costa Rica, the Knudsens trained the locals in farming butterflies for profit so they could make money from the living rainforest, instead of from a cut forest.

Back in the states, Mrs. Knudsen wrote a children's riddle book to teach children about butterflies and their life cycles and entitled it *How Are Butterflies Like Chickens?* She self-published the book for years, selling copies to schools, parks, museums, and individuals. Mrs. Knudsen also commissioned the creation of a DVD about butterflies to sell to schools when it became too much for her to do her butterfly presentation in person. Over many years, the Knudsens, particularly Betty Ann, took their extensive butterfly and moth collection to schools and groups in the community, where they were known to be local experts. The core of the Knudsen's Lepidoptera collection now makes up the Peter and Betty Ann Knudsen Butterfly Exhibit at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh.

Much of Betty Ann Knudsen's community and government service has been recognized through various awards, including that of being one of the first inductees into the Raleigh Hall of Fame, 2005. Among her numerous credits at that time, Mrs. Knudsen was said to have been instrumental in the merger of the Raleigh City and Wake County school systems, the implementation of the Capital Area Transit (CAT) system of public transportation, the establishment of a greenway system, the community use of schools, and scattered site strategy for public housing. In 2009, the Democratic Party of Wake County and its auxiliaries honored her with a public "Tribute to Betty Ann Knudsen." The event featured a screening of a DVD entitled *Show Up, Speak Out: The Public Life of Betty Ann Knudsen*. A documentary by filmmaker Vivian Bowman-Edwards, this DVD encapsulated Betty Ann Knudsen's contributions to grassroots politics, community and women's issues.

#### **Sources:**

Biographical information found within the papers, and placed in Box 1, folder 1.

Telephone interview: 29 January 2007: Betty Ann Knudsen interviewed by Fran Tracy-Walls.

United States Federal Census, 1930.

Obituary of John Peter (Pete) Knudsen, Published online after January 18, 2009, by the Cremation Society of North Carolina.

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## **Collection Overview**

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This collection contains a variety of correspondence, conducted through both regular mail and later email, and is related to various political, community, and personal topics. Mrs. Knudsen corresponded often with politicians; though the letters were primarily campaign related, personal notes were often attached to the generic campaign letter. To some extent, personal correspondence was exchanged and touched subjects beyond strict campaign topics. Included in the letters she mailed to various members of the Democratic Party, there is a letter to President Bill Clinton regarding the sex scandal in which he found himself.

The papers also contain various receipts for charitable contributions, political and non-political. The contributions were often of a monetary nature, but include those given in goods and services.

In addition to political letters related to campaigning and holding office, there is correspondence related to the organization she founded, the Royal Order of the Butterflies. Those papers include the poem from which she got the idea for the group.

Correspondence regarding Mrs. Knudsen's own political and community action spanning the 1970s, through the 2000s can be found within the papers. This includes political and community work and things like speaking engagements and workshops she had at various clubs and institutions. Also included in the collection are newspaper clippings and certificates. The newspaper clippings include News and Observer published letters to the editor, and the "People's Forum," as well as a few pieces done on the Knudsens (such as a 50th anniversary spread) and pieces including interviews. The certificates include certificates of appreciation and certificates of completion, as well as those marking more momentous events.

The collection contains within it unbound copies of her book *How Are Butterflies Like Children?* records of her school visits with the butterflies, and letters from students who enjoyed her presentation.

Personal correspondence in the papers includes Christmas letters, notes, cards, and emails. A portion of the primarily generic greeting cards and messages were not retained with the collection. Those included were deemed as relevant because of references to important life events. Examples include condolences related to her mother's passing; her congestive heart failure; the deaths of two of her brothers; and natural disasters. Additionally there is correspondence with her son, Erik, who worked for a period of time in the Middle East, and, after 2001, comments on the political/war situation as viewed from an American in that region.

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## Collection Arrangement

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Arranged by series, then chronologically therein.

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## Administrative Information

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### Publication Information

State Archives of North Carolina June, 2012

### Access Restrictions

Available for research

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## **Acquisitions Information**

Given by Betty Ann Knudsen. Received April 4, 2006.

## **Processing Information note**

Processed by Ariel Wortham, William Peace University Intern, June 2012.

Finding Aid by Ariel Wortham; additional description by Fran Tracy-Walls, June 2012.

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## **Related Materials**

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### **Related Collections**

Additional information on topics found in this collection may be found in the Manuscript and Archives Reference System (MARS) <http://mars.archives.ncdcr.gov/BasicSearch.aspx>

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## **Controlled Access Headings**

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### **Corporate Name(s)**

- Democratic Party (N.C.)
- Democratic Party (Wake County, N.C.)
- North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research.

### **Geographic Name(s)**



- Costa Rica
- Raleigh (N.C.)
- Wake County (N.C.)

**Personal Name(s)**

- Hunt, James B., 1937-
- Knudsen, Betty Ann, 1926-
- Perdue, Beverly Eaves, 1947-

**Subject(s)**

- Butterflies
- Governors--North Carolina--Correspondence
- Political campaigns
- Politicians--North Carolina--Correspondence
- Women authors--20th century
- Women politicians--North Carolina
- Women--Political activity--North Carolina--History--20th century

## Political and Community Action

## Collection Inventory

**Political and Community Action**

This series contains subject-arranged folders concerning Betty Ann Knudsen's political and community action. Included in this is a brief biography on Mrs. Knudsen, certificates she received from 1974-2005, including a Woman of Distinction award from the Women's Forum of North Carolina (she was one of the founders in 1976) and the North Carolina Council of Women's Organizations. There is correspondence regarding her political action from the 1970s through the 2000s, as well as speaking engagements dating from the same period and concerning her political and community action. Also included within this topic is a folder of newspaper clippings and letters to the editor from the mid-1990s through the 2000s, which show her political voice outside of a political leadership role.

	<b>Box</b>
Betty Ann Knudsen Biography and Public Life Resume, 2005-2006	PC.1960.1
Certificates	PC.1960.1
BAK's Political Action, 1978	PC.1960.1
BAK's Political Action, 1980-1988	PC.1960.1
BAK's Political Action, 1995-1999	PC.1960.1
BAK's Political Action, 2000-2005	PC.1960.1
BAK's Political Action	PC.1960.1
Speaking Engagements: Workshops, Classes, Business Groups	PC.1960.1
Speaking Engagements: General	PC.1960.1
Newspaper Clippings/Letters to the Editor	PC.1960.1

**Correspondence: Political, 1978-2005**

**Correspondence: Personal,**

This contains subject-arranged folders concerning Betty Ann Knudsen's political correspondence. Her political correspondence stretches from 1978 to 2005 and includes both men and women at local, state, and national levels. Elaine Marshall and Bev Perdue are among the women politicians with whom she communicated, both through official campaign mail and more personal mail, while Jim Hunt and John Edwards are among the male politicians with whom she similarly corresponded. Also under the political correspondence label are her charitable contributions to both political and non-political organizations which nevertheless present an idea of her beliefs as an individual, and correspondence with members of the Royal Order of the Butterflies, many of whom were active in politics.

**Box**

Women Politicians (Elaine Marshall, Bev Perdue, etc.)	PC.1960.2
Women Politicians	PC.1960.2
Women's Organizations Correspondence (Women's Forum of North Carolina, League of Women Voters, NC Equity)	PC.1960.2
Male Politicians (Jim Hunt, John Edwards, etc.)	PC.1960.2
Male Politicians	PC.1960.2
The Royal Order of the Butterflies (including poem and short member list)	PC.1960.2
Charitable Contributions: Political Organizations	PC.1960.2
Charitable Contributions: Non-Political Organizations	PC.1960.2
Campaign Contributions	PC.1960.2

**Correspondence: Personal, 1978-2005**

Among the correspondence defined as "personal" are Christmas letters, emails, cards, and letters dating from 1978 to 2005. Within these letters such topics as politics, family travels, family health, and family deaths are included. In her correspondence with her son Erik there is interesting insight into an American's life in the Middle East before and after September 11, 2001.

**Box**

**Butterflies,**

Correspondence mentioning politics	PC.1960.3
Christmas letters	PC.1960.3
Mail, 1978-1983	PC.1960.3
Mail, 1995-1999	PC.1960.3
Mail, 2001-2005	PC.1960.3
Mail, undated	PC.1960.3
Email, 1997-1999	PC.1960.3
Email, 2000-2003	PC.1960.3
Cards	PC.1960.3

**Butterflies, 1984-2004**

This series contains subject-arranged folders concerning Betty Ann Knudsen's work with butterflies from 1984 to 2004. Included within this category are her arrangements with schools to do presentations, notes from the students regarding the presentation, and arrangements with adult groups to do her butterfly presentation and notes from them. Also, there are records of the publishing process for her self-published riddle book, *How are Butterflies like Chickens?* in 1999, and her marketing of the book, as well as unbound copies of the book and notes from readers through 2004. The DVD she commissioned for production once actively presenting became too much is also included, as well as correspondence regarding its production. In addition, a few letters exchanged between friends in Costa Rica where she and her husband lived for six years working with butterflies is included.

	<b>Box</b>
BAK's Butterfly Presentation to Children (1 of 2)	PC.1960.4
BAK's Butterfly Presentation to Children (2 of 2)	PC.1910.4
BAK's Butterfly Presentation to Adults	PC.1960.4
<i>How Are Butterflies Like Chickens?</i> book and publishing (1 of 2)	PC.1960.4

**Butterflies,**

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<i>How Are Butterflies Like Chickens?</i> book and publishing (2 of 2)	PC.1960.4
Correspondence related to readers of the book	PC.1960.4
BAK's Butterfly DVD	PC.1960.4
Correspondence in Spanish	PC.1960.4
Pictures	PC.1960.4